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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: AVIAN FLU PREPAREDNESS IN ARMENIA

REF: A. A) STATE 190899
[B](#). B) YEREVAN 268

[1](#)1. The GOAM, with support from the USG, has significantly improved its avian flu preparedness, but would still face serious challenges responding to a large-scale outbreak. At a recent meeting, Deputy Minister of Agriculture Levon Rukhkian told us that the Ministry had almost completed a series of regional training seminars for veterinarians based on the National Response Plan. The seminars, which were designed with USG assistance, focus on teaching veterinarians to identify suspicious bird deaths, conduct preliminary field testing for AI, prepare and ship samples to a central lab in Yerevan and implement appropriate quarantine and culling measures. USAID has also helped Armenia to procure and equip two rapid response vans which will deploy to any area where there is a suspected AI outbreak to assist with case identification and appropriate response measures. The vans are scheduled to be fully operational in the next two weeks.

[1](#)2. In-country diagnostic capacity remains limited, but is improving. The GOAM has refurbished its central veterinary lab and is expecting a new PCR testing unit to be installed in the coming weeks. Lab technicians have already been trained on the equipment both locally and in the US. Rukhkian told us his ministry also plans to work with a newly PCR-equipped private laboratory. Rukhkian said that in the event of a suspicious case, the GOAM would be willing to send samples to the OIE reference lab in Padua, Italy, the lab in Wheybridge, England and the Vladimir lab in Moscow. The GOAM would try to send portions of the same sample to all three labs so the labs could confirm each others' results. Rukhkian was aware of the AI Conference in Bamako, Mali (ref A), but said that the GOAM would not attend because of financial constraints.

[1](#)3. COMMENT: AI preparedness in Armenia has improved significantly since the January 2006 outbreak in Turkey. The Ministry of Agriculture has been particularly active and, thanks to timely support from the USG, the government now has a communications strategy, trained veterinarians and will soon have improved diagnostic capacity. The World Bank project to support AI preparedness has been delayed due to disagreements over the project's scope, but USG assistance has been effectively bridging the gap (ref B). The GOAM will likely need additional support, however, if there is a large-scale animal outbreak, a human case, or in the event of human-to-human transmission.
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